12. NARADA PURANA

CHAPTER ONE TALK BETWEEN SUTA AND SAGES IN NAIMISHARANYA

Once upon a time, about twenty-six thousand sages assembled in the holy ambience of Naimisharanya. All of them had renounced their desires and homely comforts and were worshipping Lord Vishnu for the benefit of the entire humanity.

During their stay in Naimisharanya, those sages called a huge assembly to discuss about the means of attaining all the four goals of life like Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. The great sage Shaunak was presiding over the assembly. He said: "O sages! We have assembled here to discuss the most cryptic disciplines of life. But it is beyond my powers to answer the questions you have put before me. Only a great sage like Suta, who is the most learned disciple of Veda Vyasa, is able to answer these questions. Presently, he lives in a hermitage in Siddhipeeth. Let us all go there and request him to preach us about the cryptic disciplines of life." Hearing these words, all the sages thanked Shaunak with joy. Then, led by Shaunak himself, all of them reached the hermitage of the sage Suta. At the hermitage, sage Suta welcomed them all and satisfied their queries. He said:

" O great sages! I narrate to you, the great Purana, which was once narrated by the great saint Sanatkumar to Devarshi Narada and now known as Narada Purana."

CHAPTER - 2 NARADA PRAYS TO LORD VISHNU

Shaunak says: "Suta, how did Sanatkumar unfold the mystic character of the religion to Narada? When and where they had the meeting to hold this pious discussion? Kindly tell us in detail."

Suta says: "The great sage Sanatkumar, who was free from illusions, was the creation of Brahma's imagination. He always remained engrossed in the worship of Brahma. Once, he was going towards the peaks of the mighty Meru Mountains (Himalayas) when on the way, he happened to sight the sacred Ganges. He was about to take a dip in the waters when Devarshi Narada also arrived there. Devarshi Narada greeted his elder brother and took bath in the river.

After carrying out usual rituals, they seated there and started a discussion about the virtues of Lord Vishnu." Devarshi Narada asked- "O brother! How can one realize the Lord Vishnu? Who is the cause of this whole creation? What is the appearance of devotion, knowledge and penance? Kindly elaborate the mystery of treating the guests also. Also tell me, how did Lord Vishnu effected the origin of Brahma and other gods?"

Sanatkumar says: In the beginning of creation, the self-illuminating Lord Vishnu created Brahma from His right hand side, Rudra from His central part and Vishnu, his own replica from His left hand side. As Lord Vishnu is omnipresent, similarly his illusions are also omnipresent and known with different names like Lakshmi, Uma, Shakti and Chandi. These are the powers of Lord Vishnu. Some people identify these powers with the illusions created by the Lord whereas the sages regard them as nature."

The gods, who protect the world, are Purusha, and the Supreme Being, who is above these levels, is Lord. Nobody else is greater than He is. From His navel even Brahma has originated on a divine lotus. He is the Supreme Being the eternal joy incorporating all the three virtues.

O Narada! Five senses- sights, sound, scent, touch and taste have originated from the ego. Ego is the origin of other eleven senses also. These five senses in turn gave rise to five physical elements- ether, air, fire, water and earth. It was after the creation of these five physical elements that Brahma created the lower living beings. Then he created

human beings followed by the creation of all the seven worlds and seven guards of these seven worlds. For the inhabitation of the living beings, Brahma also created great mountains, plains and seven seas.

Towards the north of the great saline sea and towards the south of the great Himalayas is situated the Holy Land of India. People who worship Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu inhabit this land. Because of their virtues, even the gods worship the people who populate the Indian landmass. Those ignorant people, who do not seek salvation despite having been born in India, have to suffer the tortures of hell as long as the Sun and the Moon shine in the sky. The whole world from Brahma to a seemingly unimportant blade of grass is the manifestation of Vasudev (Lord Vishnu).

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CHAPTER - 3 PROFILE OF THE SAGE MARKANDEYA

Sanatkumar says: O sage! Faith has the greatest significance. Achievement of everything and appeasement of Lord Vishnu depend

upon the faith. Nothing is attainable without faith. Such as a human being faces inertia in the absence of life and is rendered motionless. Similarly, faith is like a spiritual light without which, religious actions of a man come to cease. Similarly, devotion is also known as the life of all the achievements. It is also the giver of four supreme goals of life like Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. No action succeeds without the input of devotion and faith. Even the menial jobs done with faith gives everlasting results. On the contrary, even the pious actions of envious people go futile. Attainment of God by envious people is impossible.

Envy is the greatest enemy of the human being. It creates a gap as big as the one that separates the sky from the nether world. O Brahmanandan! Only those people, who remain engrossed in faithful devotion of God, attain to the abode of Vishnu. Fallen are those who, despite having the knowledge of Vedas, do not comply with the moral code of conduct of their clan. Neither Vedas nor even devotion can save such people. In other words, moral conduct is everything. O great sage! Devotion is like mother who is the base of life for every living being.

O Narada! Company of the pious people and the saints is the best means to cherish devotion. Saints are the teachers of the entire world. When the sins that have been accumulating all throughout the previous births decay only when one gets pious company and those who once get pious company experiences eternal joy.

Narada says: "O great devotee of Lord Vishnu! Kindly relate the actions and appearance of the Lord's devotees to me."

Sanatkumar says: "During the period of Pralaya, when all the world was inundated, Lord Vishnu was sleeping on a Banyan leaf. That scene had amazed Markandeya, the supreme devotee of the Lord."

The sages asked: "When all the world was inundated, how did Markandeya escape? Suta kindly remove our doubt."

Suta says: "O great sages! Now, I am going to narrate the tale of Markandeya. Listen to it carefully."

Once upon a time, there lived a fortunate sage in the pious land of India. The sage was famous as Mrikandu. He had observed a very severe

penance at the holy pilgrimage center of Shaligram. His penance began to cause worry for Indra. So, accompanied by other gods, Indra reached to Lord Vishnu who was resting on Sheshnag in Ksheersagar, the ocean of milk. The gods prayed the Lord to protect them from the radiance of Mrikandu. Listening to the prayers offered by the gods, Lord Vishnu appeared in His four-armed form holding conch, wheel, mace and lotus in each of those arms. His radiance was enough to beat the shine of crore Suns. His radiance caused tremendous joy for the gods who fell flat at the feet of the Lord.

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Lord says: "O gods! Get up. I am fully aware about your miseries. But your worries are meaningless because Maharshi Mrikandu is really a gentleman. He is not going to harm you in any way. Even if the situation arises, I am always ready to protect you." Saying these words, the Lord

disappeared. Thus, assured by the Lord's words, the gods also returned to their abode. On the other hand, pleased by Mrikandu's penance, Lord appeared before him. As soon as Mrikandu opened his eyes, he saw Lord Vishnu standing before him. Lord's four-armed, blue and radiant appearance caused great exhilaration for Mrikandu. He fell flat at His feet and prayed Him with tearful eyes. Pleased with his prayers, Lord asked Mrikandu to seek a boon. But Mrikandu refused saying that he had attained salvation just by having His sight. Still, Lord said that His appearance never goes in vain," So, I will be your son who will live a long life." Granting this boon, the Lord disappeared."

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CHAPTER - 4 TALE OF THE SAGE MARKANDEYA

Narada says: "O great sage! Why did Lord Vishnu appear as the son of Mrikandu? What did He do as his son? The Puranas say that during the

Pralaya, Markandeya had witnessed the direct appearance of Lord Vishnu's illusion. Kindly narrate these things in detail."

Sanatkumar says: "Listen O Devarshi! After observing severe penance, the sage Mrikandu got married and received an equally virtuous and chaste wife. In the tenth month after their marriage, his wife gave birth to an extremely beautiful baby. The baby in fact had incorporated the radiance of the Lord. Mrikandu carried out all the necessary rituals and consecrations of the baby happily. In his fifth year, he carried out the thread ceremony of his son and started to educate him in Vedas. His education developed all the pious virtues in his son whom he had named Markandeya. After finishing his education, sage Markandeya also started a severe penance to please Lord Vishnu.

Pleased by his penance, Lord Vishnu blessed him with a boon of creating Purana Samhita. This is the reason why the sage Markandeya is also known as Narayan. O Brahmins! Lord Vishnu did not annihilate Markandeya during the Pralaya only to show him His illusions. It was due to this grace that Markandeya survived the Pralaya and passed that time floating on a Banyan leaf. As long as the Lord slept, Markandeya kept floating on that leaf. As long as the night of the Lord lasted, Markandeya stayed on that flimsy leaf. At the end of the night, when the inundating Pralaya receded and the Lord awakened from His prolonged sleep, He began the work of creation again. It was even more amazing for Markandeya to see the inundating water recede and new creation taking place. He began to pray the Lord with folded hands. Pleased by his prayers, the Lord said that He always protected His devotees even during the most severe crises. Markandeya then asked about the appearance of the true devotees of the Lord. He also expressed his curiosity to know the reasons of their birth.

Lord Vishnu says: "O great among the sages! The greatest devotees are those who do not harm others with their mind, words and actions and who are free from envy. Those who have impartial view are best among the devotees. Those who protect the human beings, cows, Brahmins, vegetation and remain engrossed in discussion of Lord's virtues. Those who salute the garden of basil and put the earth from basil's roots on their heads, those who are beloved to Lord Shiva, put Tripund on their forehead and worship Him performing Yagyas facing south. Those who

always donate water and cereals, cows and daughters are the excellent among all the devotees. O great sage! These are some of the characteristics of a true devotee. Cherish these characteristics and you will also attain salvation in the last." Thus, preaching, Lord Vishnu disappeared. Markandeya thereafter led a pious life and observed penance and in the last he too attained to the supreme abode of the Lord.

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CHAPTER - 5 THE GREATNESS OF THE GANGES

Suta says- "The glorious description of devotion for Lord Vishnu caused extreme joy for Narada."

Narada says: "O great sage Sanat! Now kindly tell me about such a place of pilgrimage which is even holier than the holiest places of pilgrimage."

Sanatkumar says: O Narada! Confluence of Ganga and Yamuna is the holier than any other place of pilgrimage. The extremely sacred and pious Ganga rises from the feet of none other than Lord Vishnu. Yamuna on the other hand is the daughter of Surya. Even the remembrance of Ganga is enough to do away with all the sins and making one peaceful.

This place where Ganga and Yamuna merge is famous as Prayag in the world. It is the same place where Brahma had once invoked Lord Vishnu in a Yagya. Since then, innumerable sages have followed Brahma and performed different kinds of Yagyas there. Even a person who recites the name of Ganga hundred miles from Prayag attains salvation. Smear the sand of Ganga's bank on the forehead is like, in a way, bearing the crescent shaped Moon on the head. Those who remember Ganga receive the benefit of performing pilgrimage to all the holy places. Among other places of pilgrimage, Varanasi has almost equal significance to that of Prayag. O Brahmin! Ganga is the mother of the entire world. Mere touch of her sacred waters saved the sixty thousand sons of Sagar. No one can describe the greatness of Ganga.

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CHAPTER - 6 FATE OF KING BAHU

Narada says: "O great sage who in the dynasty of Sagar received salvation from Preta Bhava. Who was Sagar? Kindly narrate his whole story to me."

Sanatkumar says: "Long ago, there occurred a king named Bahu in the dynasty of Surya. He was very religious in nature and looked after his subjects like his own offspring. Everyone was happy in his kingdom, which he ruled with polity and justice".

But destiny was playing another game for the king. With time, evils like envy and ego began to rise in the mind of Bahu. He began to think that nobody else was as religious as he was. These evils in turn caused the king to incline towards sensual pleasures. O Narada! An unconscious mind is the greatest cause of destruction. Everyone, even the better half begins to nurture hostility against such a person. So, the same thing happened with the king Bahu. Many neighbouring kings together launched a massive attack on the kingdom of Bahu and defeated him after a month-long fierce battle.

After his defeat, the king Bahu left his kingdom and began to wander along with his queens. At last, he came to stay beside a big lake. Even the local inhabitants and lower creatures hid seeing the king approach. His subjects too had lost their sympathies for him.

Now the life of the king was not more than the death. So, repenting his condition, king Bahu met his death in the presence of the sage Aurv. At that time, his youngest queen was expecting an issue. After her husband's death, she decided to commit Sati. But, the sage Aurv prevented her convincing that her would be son would enjoy more popularity than his father had. Besides, nothing is more wretched than killing an unborn baby. Thus, convincing the queen with all means, sage Aurv guided the queens to perform cremation of her husband and other rituals. Since then, both the queens began to live in the hermitage of sage Aurv.

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CHAPTER - 7 THE BIRTH OF SAGAR

Sanatkumar says: - "O Narada! Both the queens were passing their time in the hermitage of sage Aurv. When half of the rainy season had passed,

the elder queen began to cultivate evil feelings for the younger. She, therefore, made deceitfully the younger queen to consume poison. But the poison could not affect the queen and her unborn baby because of the virtues she had acquired serving the sage Aurv. After three months, the younger queen gave birth to a son. Sage Aurv carried out necessary rituals and consecrations of the child and named him Sagar because he was bom with the effect of poison."

Sagar began to grow in Aurv's hermitage. The sage had started to train the boy in weaponry. One day, out of curiosity, Sagar asked his mother about his father. His mother related to him all the events that took place with his father king Bahu, her husband. Listening to the fate of his father, Sagar took an oath to destroy all those who had caused misery to his father. Circumambulating his teacher Aurv and taking his mother's permission, Sagar at once set out on his mission. His first halt was at the hermitage of sage Vashishta.

Sagar narrated the whole thing to the sage Vashishta. Sage Vashishta presented him with a number of divine weapons and saw him off blessing him with a boon for victory. Armed with many divine weapons and the blessings of his mother and teachers, Sagar defeated even the most powerful enemies of his father in no time and established his rule over the entire earth. The defeated kings took asylum in the hermitage of sage Vashishta who assured them to be fearless. Spies on the other hand informed Sagar about this development. Sagar at once set out to the hermitage of Vashishta with an intention of exterminating those kings but meanwhile, sage Vashishta had got all the kings shaven. So, assuming that his enemies were dead, Sagar mockingly said to sage Vashishta: "O sage! Why are you guarding these characterless creatures? I will not spare their lives."

Vashishta says: "O son! You are great. Now listen to me carefully for your benefit. I have already killed your enemies, so you will not gain anything killing them again. O king! This physical body is the root of all the sins. You will not receive popularity killing the physical body. So, give this matter a little thought before killing them." The words of sage Vashishta soothed Sagar's anger. Thereafter, sage Vashishta carried out the coronation of Sagar.

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The king Sagar had two wives, Keshini and Sumati. They both were the daughters of Vidharba's king Kashyapa. When sage Aurv heard about S agar's coronation, he visited his palace and returned after preaching him. Some months later, with a desire of having sons, both the queens secretly

summoned sage Aurv once again and received the talisman for having sons. Meditating for a while, the sage Aurv said: "O fortunate ones! One of you will receive a son who will continue his progeny in future and the other will have sixty thousand powerful sons."

The sage also advised them to seek the boon of their respective choices. With time, Keshini gave birth to one son Asmanjas who grew in a whimsical person. Sumati gave birth to sixty thousand sons who were very obedient initially but following Asmanjas, they too began to behave whimsically. Asmanjas had one son, Anshuman who was very obedient to his grandfather. Sixty thousand sons of Sagar soon began to torment all the three worlds. Perplexed by their atrocities, Indra appealed to the sage Kapila to get them rid of their woes. With the inspiration of Sage Kapila, Sagar organized an Ashwamedha Yagya. Indra kidnapped the horse of the Yagya and tethered at the hermitage of sage Kapila. When all the sixty thousand princes reached Kapila's hermitage, they began to abuse him seeing the horse there. Infuriated Kapila at once incinerated them with his curse. King Sagar then sent Anshuman in search of his sixty thousand sons and recovered the horse. Sage Kapila assured Anshuman that his grandson Bhagirath would please Ganga to descend and save his ancestors.

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CHAPTER - 8 SALVATION OF SAUDAS

Narada says: "O great brother! Why did sage Vashishta curse Saudas and how did he recover from this curse by the virtue of the Ganges waters?"

Sanatkumar says: "O Narada! Saudas was a virtuous king. He ruled over his subjects religiously. He was very fond of hunting. So, one day, he went on hunting in the forest. He continued his excursion all day long. Towards evening, he reached at the bank of Godavari and decided to pass the night there. In the next morning also, he began his hunting excursion one again. During the hunting, he spotted a deer and began to chase it. Chasing the deer, he reached the core of the forest.

There, the king saw a pair of tigers copulating. Saudas was an expert archer. He trained an arrow and killed the tigress in just one shot. As soon as the tigress died, she assumed the form of an enormous ogress. Death of his partner infuriated the tiger, which was in fact a monster in disguise. He decided to avenge the death of his mate. On the other hand, the whole event frightened the king. He held a hasty parley with his ministers. They unanimously took a decision to give up the hunting forever.

Long afterwards, king Saudas organized an Ashwamedha Yagya in the auspices of sage Vashishta. At the completion of Yagya, sage Vashishta went to take a bath before taking his meal. Meanwhile, the monster appeared there in the guise of Vashishta and expressed his desire to eat meat. Then, in the guise of the cook, the monster cooked human flesh and served it in golden bowls. When sage Vashishta arrived, Saudas offered him the dishes made of human flesh. For a while, Vashishta thought in amazement but soon he realized the whole thing. Indignantly, he cursed the king to become a man-eating demon.

The king tried to assert his ignorance and said- "You yourself had expressed your desire to eat the meat." With his divine sight, sage Vashishta learnt that the king had been tricked with. By then, the king himself got ready to curse the sage in retaliation. But his prudent wife Madayanti stopped him. Thus, convinced by the queen, the anger of Saudas subsided. But he had taken water in his palm, so the problem arose where to dispose it off for it was sure to burn anything it fell upon. After a little consideration, the king dropped that water right on his feet that burnt immediately. Since then, the king Saudas came to be known as Kalmashpad. Sage Vashishta then consoled him. Vashishta says: "O king! Imprudence is the root of all the obstacles and crises. But O king! You have no reason to be sorry. Your miseries will end soon and you will

regain your original radiance by the virtue of the Ganges' waters." Saying this, sage Vashishta returned to his hermitage.

The whole body of the king had turned black. Since then, he began to roam in the forests like a wild animal. There he ate whatever he found-animals, birds and even human beings. Within six months, he devoured all the animals in one hundred Yojan expanses of the forests. Then he migrated to another area in the forest. One day, in the guise of a monster, Saudas was wandering in a forest on the bank of Narmada. There he spotted a sage couple engaged in carnal conjugation. Saudas at once got hold of the sage and began to devour him.

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The sage's wife pleaded him to release her husband but Saudas did not pay heed to her pleas and devoured the sage. In anguish and anger, the Brahmini cursed Saudas that he would die if he tried to copulate with a woman and that he would always remain a monster. Infuriated, Saudas

cursed her in retaliation: "O evil one! Just one curse was sufficient. Why did you pour down two curses on me? Go and become a devil." The Brahmini at once turned into a devil. Afterwards, both of them began to wander in the forest. One day, they reached to such part of the forest where another monster was living. That monster too had acquired the formidable appearance because of not obeying his teacher. Seeing them, the monster enquired about the reasons of their coming to that forest. They narrated the whole thing to him.

Saudas says: "O friend! Who are you? Tell me, what sins did you committed. Do not conceal anything from your friends."

The monster says: "Before acquiring this appearance, I was a Brahmin and well versed in all the Vedas. I lived in Magadh. One day, blinded by my knowledge and youth, I insulted my teacher. That is the reason of my acquiring this monster's appearance. Since then, I have been eating flesh only and I do not know how many Brahmins I have devoured so far. Still, my hunger is insatiated. O fortunate one! Hence I advise each and everyone never to insult their teachers."

Saudas says: "What is a teacher? Who was your teacher?"

The monster says: O brother! There are many kinds of teachers but I am telling about the most revered ones. All the teachers of Vedas, preachers of scriptures and mantras, remover of doubts, protectors, wife's father, elder brother, mother's brother, family priest and own mother and father fall in the category of teachers. I had received preaching about all the religions from sage Gautam while staying on the enchanting banks of the Ganges. Once, when I went to worship Shiva, I did not greet him. Sage Gautam did not mind my behavior but Lord Shiva turned me into a monster out of anger."

That sort of pious discussion among the monsters attenuated their sins. In the meantime, a Brahmin, who had hailed from Kalinga (Orrisa), arrived there carrying the holy water of Ganges. The monsters requested the Brahmin to sprinkle some of the waters over them. They also narrated the greatness of Ganges before the Brahmin. Pleased with their willingness, and appraisal of Ganges, the Brahmin sprinkled some Ganges water on them. The monster and the ogress resumed their divine

appearance but Saudas remained unchanged. His worries began to mount but the invisible Saraswati consoled and advised him to recite the Lord's name. Saudas then migrated to Varanasi where he continuously recited the Lord's name and took bath in the holy Ganges. Thus, he overcame the curse of Brahmini and returned to his kingdom. There, sage Vashishta once again carried out his coronation. Since then, Saudas ruled his kingdom through religious means and attained the supreme abode of Lord Vishnu.

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CHAPTER - 9 KING BALI DEFEATS THE GODS

Narada says: "O brother! Kindly narrate the tale of the Ganges' origin from the feet of lord Vishnu."

Sanatkumar says: Long ago, in the beginning of creation, one sage Kashyapa had two wives Diti and Aditi. They both were the daughters of Daksha. Aditi was the mother of the gods while Diti had given birth to demons. Thus, the demons and the gods were stepbrothers and fought accordingly for the power and prestige. Demons were elder. HiranyaKashyapa, the demon king was the son of Diti. His son Prahlada was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu. In the lineage of Prahlada, occurred the great king Bali who was the son of Virochan.

Bali had conquered entire earth and was now eyeing the heaven. Bali had two ministers, Kubhand and Koopkama and an equally prowessive son Ban. With a huge army, Bali launched a massive attack on heaven and soon a fierce battle broke out. The battle lasted for one thousand years. At last, the gods lost the heaven to the demons and began to wander here and there in search of solace. Defeating the gods, the king Bali organized many Ashwamedha Yagyas. Feeling sorry for the plight of her sons, Aditi began a severe penance on the Himalayas.

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CHAPTER -10 ORIGIN OF THE GANGES

Narada says: "O brother! You narrated a wonderful tale. Now, kindly relate to me, how did the Ganges originate?"

Sanatkumar says: O Narada! Pleased with the severe penance of Aditi, Lord Vishnu appeared before her and asked her to seek a boon. Feeling elated with exhilaration, Aditi fell flat at the Lord's feet. She intimated the Lord about the plight of her sons and sought that He should help them to regain the heaven without killing the demons for they were also her sons though step. Pleased by her indiscrimination for her stepsons, Lord Vishnu assured Aditi that soon He would arrive as her son and save the gods from their miseries. Then, the Lord presented Aditi with His garland and disappeared. In due course of time, Aditi gave birth to a son who was holding a conch, a wheel, a mace and a lotus in each of his four hands. The child was named as Vamana. Even his father, sage Kashyapa greeted him with respect.

By the time, when the thread ceremony was about to be carried out for Vamana, king Bali organized a grand Ashwamedha Yagya in the auspices of his teacher Shukracharya. Lord Vishnu Himself had been invoked in the Yagya along with Lakshmi. Taking his parent's permission, Vamana too arrived at the sight of the Yagya. With their divine sight, all the sages who were present there recognized Lord Vishnu and felt extreme joy and greeted Him with respect. Even Shukracharya understood the motive of Vamana's coming there. He cautioned Bali in isolation not to grant any demand of Vamana. He also advised Bali to abide by his dictate or he would have to face severe consequences.

But illumined by the destiny, king Bali did not pay heed to Shukracharya's advice and welcomed Vamana warmly and asked him to seek anything he wished. Vamana said: "O king! If you want to give me something, kindly grant me three steps of land so that I may carry out my Yagyas smoothly. King Bali tried to dissuade Vamana with temptations of heavenly comforts and other luxuries. But Vamana stayed to his demand that he needed nothing else but three steps of land for carrying out Yagyas. At last Bali agreed to grant his demand. He requested Vamana to pour some water from the Kamandalu on his palm so that he could take a vow. As the last attempt to prevent Bali from making a vow, Shukracharya assumed a miniature appearance and clogged the snout of the kamandalu. The omniscient Lord pricked the snout with a sharp stem and pricked Shukracharya's one eye.

Thereafter, taking some water on his palm, king Bali proceeded to grant

Vamana three steps of land. As soon as Bali granted the demand, Vamana assumed a gigantic appearance and measured the entire earth and heaven in his two steps. While Lord Vishnu was measuring the universe, it broke into two pieces with the impact of His toe. With the tearing of the universe, millions of streams sprang out. In the course of their flow, these streams merged into a single mightier stream and, sanctifying Brahma and other deities, fell on the mighty Sumeru Mountain (Himalayas). As there was no other room left for the Lord to put His third step, Bali presented his own head for the purpose. Vamana put his third step on Bali's head and pressed him down into the hades.

Narada says: "O great sage! How did the Lord arrange for Bali's food in the nether world?" Sanatkumar says: "Oblations offered without hymns and alms given to undeserving person constitute the food for Bali. Thus, the Lord snatched the kingdom of heaven from Bali without any bloodshed and returned it to the gods."

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CHAPTER -11 DEFINITION OF DHARMA

Narada says:"o great sage! I have just heard the tale of sacred Ganges. Now kindly describe about the people who deserve to take donations."

Sanatkumar says: O Narada! Brahmin is considered as the excellent among all the four castes. Hence, to make the donation fruitful, one should donate to the Brahmins only. A Brahmin can accept donation candidly but not a Vaishya or a Kshatriya. Even among Brahmins, there are many categories who do not deserve to accept donation.

These are- Brahmins who practice astrology, act against the religion, who are greedy, who sell scriptures and other religious materials, who have relations with other women than their wives, who are envious, ungrateful, singer, who have characterless wife, who are soldiers, priests, harbinger, cook, poet, doctor, who eat meat and cereals given by a Shudra, who carry out cremation and the Brahmins who consume the food given by prostitutes. Donation given to all these types of Brahmins go futile. Besides these, Brahmins who habitually enjoy sensual pleasures during siesta, who dine during the dusk, who have been boycotted by their brothers and society, who have taken birth illegitimately or after the death of their real father because of dubious relations of their mother, whose younger brother have married earlier and those who are always controlled by lusty women, who act as pimps or remain indulged in mean activities also do not deserve donation.

Donation, spending to meet necessities and wasting in useless activities are the three fates of wealth. A donation made selflessly to a deserving person on a request is excellent among all kinds of donations. A donation made with some desire is mediocre while donation given as sacrifice is of the lowest category.

Sanatkumar then narrated the tale of Bhagirath and Dharmaraj.

Once, Dharmaraj visited the kingdom of king Sagar. Dharmaraj praised Sagar overtly. With folded hands, king Sagar requested Dharmaraj to preach him about religion and non-religion and tell him something about divine worlds and hell. Dharmaraj says:"o king! Providing a Brahmin family or a Vedapathi Brahmin with a means of sustenance is the most virtuous donation. Inspiring others to make donation to such a Brahmin is also equally fruitful. Apart from these, digging out reservoirs and maintaining them and inspiring others to do the same thing also bears unending fruits." To corroborate his point, Dharmaraj narrated the tale of king Veerbhadrak and his minister Buddhiraj.

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CHAPTER -12 DESCRIPTION OF RELIGIOUS ACTION

Dharmaraj says: "O king! Those who build temples with earth stay in the abode of Vishnu for three kalpas. Then they attain Brahmaloka. One

receives double virtues if he builds a temple with wood. Building a temple with bricks and stones gives four-fold virtue while with the precious stones one gets ten-fold virtues. Building of temple with copper and gold gives hundred fold and crore fold virtues. Those who preserve temples and reservoirs receive hundred times more virtues than the builders do. Virtues of a rich man donating whole estate and a poor person donating a yard of land are equal."

"O virtuous one! Those who develop gardens and parks also receive same virtues. Those who preserve them receive more virtues than the developers. One who plants a basil sapling saves his crores of ancestors. Similarly, those who bathe the Lord's idol with milk on Dwadashi and Poomamasi save millions of their ancestors. Those who bathe Lord's idol with Panchamrit on Ekadashi receive everlasting joy and salvation. Similarly, those who bathe Lord's idol with coconut milk, sugarcane juice, and water containing flowers or filtered water get free from all their sins. Similarly, those who bathe Lord Vishnu's idol during eclipses or on auspicious dates and conjugations receive the virtue of all the Yagyas. Those who bathe Lord Vishnu's and Shiva's idols with coconut milk, ghee, honey and sesame oil on auspicious dates assume respective appearances of these gods."

"Those who worship Lord Vishnu and Shiva offering them flowers of lotus, Pandanus, and particularly offer Dhatura to Lord Shiva attain their respective abodes. Similarly, donation of Guggul (scented raisin), lamp, water and cereal bears inexhaustible fruits. Virtues of donating land and milch cow to a Brahmin cannot be described in words. It is the case with the donation of knowledge, Shaligram, Shivalinga, horse, buffalo, elephant or any other vehicle. Those who arrange for the cremation of an orphaned Brahmin receive virtues equal to thousands of Ashwamedha Yagyas. Those who serve the Brahmin deities or cow, those who play instruments, bell, and blow conch or clap in the temple enjoy intimacy with divine beauties in the heaven for five Kalpas. Blowing of conch helps one attain the abode of Vishnu. Even the remembrance of Lord Vishnu's name does away with the imminent crises."

CHAPTER - 12 DESCRIPTION OF RELIGIOUS ACTION

Dharmaraj says: "O king! Those who build temples with earth stay in the abode of Vishnu for three kalpas. Then they attain Brahmaloka. One receives double virtues if he builds a temple with wood. Building a temple with bricks and stones gives four-fold virtue while with the precious stones one gets ten-fold virtues. Building of temple with copper and gold gives hundred fold and crore fold virtues. Those who preserve temples and reservoirs receive hundred times more virtues than the builders do. Virtues of a rich man donating whole estate and a poor person donating a yard of land are equal."

"O virtuous one! Those who develop gardens and parks also receive same virtues. Those who preserve them receive more virtues than the developers. One who plants a basil sapling saves his crores of ancestors. Similarly, those who bathe the Lord's idol with milk on Dwadashi and Poornamasi save millions of their ancestors. Those who bathe Lord's idol with Panchamrit on Ekadashi receive everlasting joy and salvation. Similarly, those who bathe Lord's idol with coconut milk, sugarcane juice, and water containing flowers or filtered water get free from all their sins. Similarly, those who bathe Lord Vishnu's idol during eclipses or on auspicious dates and conjugations receive the virtue of all the Yagyas. Those who bathe Lord Vishnu's and Shiva's idols with coconut milk, ghee, honey and sesame oil on auspicious dates assume respective appearances of these gods."

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CHAPTER -13 EXPIATION FOR THE SINS

Dharmaraj says: "O king! I am now going to narrate about the religion. Listen to it faithfully. If a person touches or gets touched by an impure or

irreligious thing, he should observe fast for three days and six nights for expiation. He should take bath thrice a day. If a Brahmin defecates during dining, he must give up his food at once and take water only. Then he should observe a fast for a day and night and close it taking Panchgavya only to get pure again. If a person dines immediately after urination, or urinates during dining, he must observe a day and night long fast and close it with Havan. Those women who do not serve their husbands should be expelled from the home for a period of twelve years and should not be helped in any way during the exile. Impurity resulted because of touching a woman in menses takes fast for three nights to get purified."

Dead body of a person who had committed suicide should be smeared with sandalwood paste or any other holy material. If a person escapes an attempt to suicide, a fine of two hundred rupees should be imposed on him.

Those who deliberately eat cereals of washers, skinners and other downtrodden classes and tribes or have illicit contacts with their women are required to observe Chandrayan fast in order to get pure. For those who establish abhorrent connection with their mother, sister or daughter, self-immolation is the only way to expiate. Those who mate with their teacher's wife formal observance of fast is required. If someone has killed a pregnant cow, he must expiate for it observing Chandrayan fast separately for each of the animals.

One should not use the soil collected from pond's bottom, termite's mound, mouse burrow, barren land, road, cremation ground and ground used for defecation purpose. Use of Panchgavya washes even the most severe sin. If a second death occurs in the family while the purification period of first death is still on; separate purification is not required. Ill effect of an abortion lasts for three days. After marriage, a woman adopts her husband's name. Hence, oblation for a married woman must be offered by her son or someone belonging to her husband's clan. Ashes must be collected on the first, second, third or fourth day after the cremation. One must offer watery oblations to his dead ancestors standing in navel-deep water facing south.

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CHAPTER -14 TORTURE IN THE HELL

Dharmaraj says: "O king! Those who commit severe sin on earth are bound to suffer equally severe torturing in hell. I am now describing

about such sins and the tortures vouchsafed for them in the hells. Tapan, Balukakumbh, Maharaurav, Raurav, Kumbhipak, Pramardan, Lalabhaksha, Vasakup and Vaitami are some of the prominent hells. Drinking of urine in a ditch full of feces, eating of canine flesh, eating of worms, drinking of semen, sleeping on cinders, stinging by snakes, boring through bones, drinking of bile, biting by ants, breaking of teeth, tethering to hot iron etc. are some of the tortures one has to face for his sins in the hell. Those who criticize Brahmins and dictate them or kill them, drinker, those who steal gold, have illicit contact with the wife of their teacher and even those who accompany such people are condemned as great sinners. All of them deserve a place in the hell."

Stealing of items like copper, iron, water, musk, betelnut, sandalwood etc. is also like the crime of stealing gold. Illicit contact with sister and daughter-in-law and forceful copulation with a woman in menses are also like having illicit contact with the wife of the teacher. Our great sages have given dictates for the expiation of such sins. Those who live in Buddhist monasteries or frequently visit there live in the hells for crores of years. Sinners pass initial phase of their expiation in the hells. For the seven births then, they take incarnation as asses. Then for the next six births, they appear as snake, diseased people, dog, deer, tree and monitor. O king! Those who long for and have illicit contacts with women other than wife are forced to copulate with a pretty but extremely hot copper mannequin and then thrown into the hells. Those women who prefer to sleep with men other than husband are forced to embrace hot iron statue on a blazing bed. Then they are forced to embrace a hot iron pillar, take bath in saline water, and drink it. They have to suffer these tortures for thousand years.

Those who listen to other's criticism with interest have to bear lot of suffering. Hot nails are hammered into their ears. The pores thus formed are filled with boiling oil. They are then thrown into Kumbhipak hell.

Those who abuse Lord Vishnu and Shiva are fed with salt only for crores of years then they are thrown into Raurav hell, which is full of hot scorching sand. Traitors and greedy of other's cereals have to eat their own flesh. Those who eat astrologer's and priest's cereals are kept in different hells for crores of years followed by their keeping in the wells of boiling oil and saline water where they are fed with feces only. At the

completion of their punishment, such people appear as Malechchha on earth. Those who torment others are thrown into Vaitami. Those who do not perform Panchmaha Yagya or worship deities are kept in Lalabhaksha and Raurav hells respectively.

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Those who do not act as per the scriptures are thrown into the hells for thousand crores of Kalpas. Those who throw excretion from their bodies or leave parts like hair, tooth, bone, nails etc. in the temple commit sins equal to killing an unborn baby. They are subjected to severe tortures in the hells before being sent into abhorrent incarnations. Those who give false witness undergo sufferings in the hells till the rules of fourteen Indras. Those who do not curb immoral traffic despite being capable go to hell. Those who falsely blame gentlepeople have to live in the hell for crores of years. Those who give up a fast before stipulated period go to the hell named Asipatra. There is no penance for the ones who adopt partial view during justice or religious education. Those who consume cow's flesh live in Vingbhojya hell for thousands of years. Those who torture Brahmins through their thoughts, actions and words always fall in the hell. Those who destroy gardens have to suffer all the above mentioned hells.

O king!" One must repent for his sins before Lord Vishnu. Sight of the Ganges and basil, singing of devotional songs, magnanimity and non-violence attenuate the effect of the sin. No action bears fruit if not offered to Lord Vishnu. Devotion to Lord Vishnu is the excellent way to repent for the sins. Abidance to morality is the best way to train the religion. Religion without morality is equally painful. O king! Now I have related all about religion. Since now onwards, cultivate devotion for Lord Vishnu and invoke the Ganges to descend on earth in order to save your sinister ancestors. Only the Ganges is capable of saving one and all."

Sanatkumar says: "O Narada! Thus preaching the king Sagar, Dharmaraj disappeared from the sight. It was due to the severe penance of king Bhagirath that the Ganges descended on the earth and saved the sixty thousand deceased sons of Sagar."

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CHAPTER -15 DESCENT OF GANGES AND SALVATION OF SAGAR'S SONS

Narada says:"o Muni! What did king Bhagirath do on Himalayas? How

did he please Ganges to descend on the earth?"

Sanatkumar says: O Narada! Renouncing all his royal comforts, Bhagirath went to the snowcapped, lofty peaks of the Himalayas. There he saw dense forest and herds of deer and elephants playing. Even his hermitage was full of sweet chattering of the birds. Reciting of Vedas and other scriptures was reverberating all around. Bhagirath came face to face with the sage Bhrigu who was surrounded by his disciples. Bhagirath approached and respectfully greeted the sage Bhrigu.

Bhagirath says: "O omniscient sage! Kindly grace me with the knowledge of the path that leads even the most mournful souls to salvation."

Bhrigu says: "O king! I know that you have arrived here with a beautiful motive of saving your ancestors. Hence, you are like Sri Hari yourself. Now, I describe about the actions, which please Sri Hari. O king, be non-violent, altruistic, virtuous, speak truth and seek pious company to be a devotee of Lord Vishnu. Recite the following mantras- AUM NAMO BHAGVATE VASUDEVAY NAMAH IAUM NAMO VASUDEVAY

You will definitely attain peace of mind."

Bhagirath says: "O sage! What is truth? What is in the interest of all the living beings? Who are evil ones? Who are ascetics? What are virtuous actions? How should one remember and worship Lord Vishnu? What is peace? O great sage! Kindly describe about these things."

Bhrigu says: "O knowledgeous one! All such actions, which do not harm any living being, are non-violence. Actions, which aid in moral conduct and pacify the people, are in the interest of the public. All the people who are envious and oppose the religion and the scriptures are evil ones. Those who tread the path shown by religion and scriptures and always engage in the benefit of people are ascetics in the true sense. All the actions, which lead to devotion for Lord Vishnu and cause extreme joy for all are virtuous. Lord Vishnu incorporates all the other deities. Having such thoughts like 'I will worship Him with correct methods' is devotion. Seeing Lord Vishnu in each living and non-living things is impartial view. To be in peace and harmony in all circumstances with each and everyone is peace. O king! I have described now all the things to you. Go now and

begin your penance. May it all be well for you."

Thus, with the permission and blessing of sage Bhrigu, king Bhagirath started his penance. He continued his penance for sixty thousand years at length in an enchanting place Nandeshwar in Himalayas. Seeing his severe penance, and perplexed by its radiance, all the gods appeared before Lord Vishnu in Ksheersagar.

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The gods say: "O remover of sorrows! O controller of all the three worlds! We all greet you.

Pleased by the prayers, Lord Vishnu instinctively learnt about the motive

of the gods. He assured them to be fearless and Himself appeared before Bhagirath. Bhagirath felt hilarious and greeted Sri Hari.

Lord Vishnu says: "Your desires shall be fulfilled. Your ancestors shall attain to my abode. But now go and pray Lord Shiva with your full capacity. He will definitely benefit you." Saying this, Lord Vishnu disappeared. The king stood there for some time wondering whether it was all a dream when an invisible voice announced, 'it was not a dream O king! It is reality. Do as Lord Vishnu has said.'

King Bhagirath began even more severe penance to please Lord Shiva. After a prolonged penance, Lord Shiva appeared there. Bhagirath fell flat at His feet. Pleased by his devotion and prayers, Lord Shiva blessed Bhagirath that He would hand over the Ganges to him for the salvation of his ancestors. As soon as Lord Shiva uttered these words, the Ganges emerged from His tussocks and followed Bhagirath wherever he walked.

Thus, following Bhagirath, the Ganges reached Gangasagar at the hermitage of sage Kapila where the ashes of Bhagirath's ancestors were lying unattended. As soon as the holy waters of the Ganges touched the ashes, Bhagirath's ancestors got freed from the noose of Yama and ascended to their heavenly abode. Since then, the Ganges is also known as Bhagirathi.

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CHAPTER -16 DESCRIPTION OF DWADASHI FAST

The sages say: "O fortunate one! You have obliged us narrating the tale of sacred Ganges. Now we desire to hear what Narada asked Sanatkumar."

Suta says: "O great sages! Now I narrate what Narada asked Sanatkumar, listen to it carefully."

Narada says: "I am blessed hearing the pious tale of the Ganges. Now kindly tell me about the fast and rituals performing which, Sri Hari could be pleased."

Sanatkumar says: O Narada! May God bless you! You are the supreme devotee of Lord Vishnu. That's why, you are asking about these rituals. Now I am telling you about these rituals and fasts, which make a man fearless. O Narada! There is a special provision for worshipping Lord Vishnu on the twelfth day of Shukla Paksha (brighter phase) in the month of Margashirsh. This worship could be performed wearing white or yellow clothes. During the worship, one should recite the mantra - KESHAVAYA NAMASTUBHYAM.

One should then offer oblations of ghee and sesame seeds in sacred fire. During the night, one should sing devotional songs before Shaligram and remain awakened. Then the idol of Vishnu should be bathed with five liters of milk. Similarly, Goddess Lakshmi and Lord Vishnu should be worshipped with Naivedya and edible items three times. Next morning, similar worship should be repeated.

At the end of the worship, one should donate sweetmeats made of milk, ghee and coconut to Brahmin while reciting-'May the Lord materialize all my wishes.' Seeing off the Brahmin, one should break his fast at the end.

On the same day, in the month of Pausha, one should observe a fast and worship Lord Vishnu's idol bathing it with milk while reciting NAMO NARAYANA.

In this worship also, there is provision of nightlong prayers and vigilance. Donating the Brahmins with rice, pulses, ghee etc., one should respectfully feed them and break his fast in the last. Donation of Dakshaina is a must. Similarly, on the same day in the month of Magh, there is a provision of daylong fast and worship. This time, five kilos of sesame seeds are donated to the Brahmins.

On the twelfth day of Shukla Paksha in Phagun, one should bathe Sri Hari's idol with five liters of milk. Then one hundred and eight oblations

of sesame seeds and ghee are made to the sacred fire. Nightlong prayers, feeding of Brahmins etc. are as usual. In this worship, unhusked rice is donated. The required mantra is GOVINDAY NAMASTUBHYAM

On the same day in the month of Chaitra, there is a provision of bathing Vishnu's idol with five liters of ghee and making oblations of honey, ghee and sesame seeds one hundred and eight times while reciting - NAMOSTU VISHNAVE TUBHYAM

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Then four kilos of rice are donated to a Brahmin.

On the twelfth day in the brighter phase of Vaishakh, there is a provision of bathing Vishnu's idol with milk and making one hundred and eight

oblations of ghee reciting -NAMASTE MADHUHANTE

On the twelfth day in the brighter phase of Jyeshtha, there is a provision of offering one hundred and eight oblations of kheer (rice cooked in four liters of milk) while reciting NAMAH TRIVIKRAMAY.

Twenty Malpuas (wheat flour kneaded in milk and sugar and fried in ghee) are donated to a Brahmin.

On the same day in the month of Ashadh, Lord Vishnu's idol is bathed with four liters of milk. Then oblations of ghee are made and cereal mixed with coconut and curd are donated to the Brahmins. This worship is directed to Vamana incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Hence, mantra NAMASTE VAMANAY is recited all along the rituals.

In the month of Shravan, there is a provision of bathing Lord's idol with milk and honey on the twelfth day of the brighter phase. Then one hundred and eight oblations are made reciting -SRIDHARAY NAMOSTUTE.

Then four liters of milk, clothes and two golden earrings are donated to the Brahmin.

Lord's idol should be bathed with milk while reciting - HRISHIKESH NAMOSTUBHYAM on the twelfth day in the month of Bhadrapad.

Then one hundred and eight oblations are made with cooked cereals mixed with honey. Wheat donated along with gold to the Brahmins besides feeding them with respect.

In the month of Ashwin also, Lord's idol is bathed with five liters of milk. Then, one hundred and eight oblations are offered with ghee, sesame seeds and rice reciting - NAMASTE PADMANABHAY.

Two hundred and fifty grams of honey are donated to a Brahmin. In the month of Kartik, on the same day, Lord's idol is bathed with four liters of milk, curd or ghee while reciting- NAMO DAMODARAY.

Then, one hundred and eight oblations are offered with sesame seeds mixed with honey and ghee. This worship is closed with donating five

types of edible items to a deserving Brahmin, feeding him and seeing him off with Dakshaina.

O Munivar! Those who observe this virtuous fast for the twelve months of a year attains to the supreme abode. Observance of this fast for one or two months only is also equally benefiting. If this fast is observed for a year, there is a provision of special closing ritual at the end so that one shouldn't have to observe it again in his life. This closing ritual is performed on the twelfth day of the darker phase in the month of Margsheersh.

Then four kilos of rice are donated to a Brahmin.

On the twelfth day in the brighter phase of Vaishakh, there is a provision of bathing Vishnu's idol with milk and making one hundred and eight oblations of ghee reciting -NAMASTE MADHUHANTE

On the twelfth day in the brighter phase of Jyeshtha, there is a provision of offering one hundred and eight oblations of kheer (rice cooked in four liters of milk) while reciting NAMAH TRIVIKRAMAY.

Twenty Malpuas (wheat flour kneaded in milk and sugar and fried in ghee) are donated to a Brahmin.

On the same day in the month of Ashadh, Lord Vishnu's idol is bathed with four liters of milk. Then oblations of ghee are made and cereal mixed with coconut and curd are donated to the Brahmins. This worship is directed to Vamana incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Hence, mantra NAMASTE VAMANAY is recited all along the rituals.

In the month of Shravan, there is a provision of bathing Lord's idol with milk and honey on the twelfth day of the brighter phase. Then one hundred and eight oblations are made reciting - SRIDHARAY NAMOSTUTE.

Then four liters of milk, clothes and two golden earrings are donated to the Brahmin.

Lord's idol should be bathed with milk while reciting - HRISHIKESH NAMOSTUBHYAM on the twelfth day in the month of Bhadrapad.

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O Munivar! Those who observe this virtuous fast for the twelve months of a year attains to the supreme abode. Observance of this fast for one or two months only is also equally benefiting. If this fast is observed for a year, there is a provision of special closing ritual at the end so that one shouldn't have to observe it again in his life. This closing ritual is performed on the twelfth day of the darker phase in the month of Margsheersh.

One should get up early in the morning that day and after attending routine tasks; he should take bath, wear white clothes, smear sandalwood paste on the forehead and make a square-shaped altar on the ground. This altar should be decorated with jingling bells, whiskers, flags and

white cloth. On the four comers of the altar, four lamps should be lighted.

At the center of the altar, a Sarvatobhadra wheel is drawn and twelve ums filled with water are kept on it. Putting five kinds of gems in these urns, they should be covered with white cloth. The worshipper must procure silver or gold idols of Lakshmi and Lord Vishnu and place them on the lids of the ums. Frugality is not expected in this ritual. These idols should be bathed with milk containing ghee, honey, curd and five types of dry fruits. It should be followed with proper worship of Lord Vishnu and Goddess Lakshmi. These rituals last nightlong.

Next morning, oblations are offered with sesame seeds reciting all the twelve mantras described above. Donation of ten Malpuas, curd, kheer, ghee etc. are made to twelve Brahmins. At last, all the idols and other materials are handed over to the priest who had guided the worship. Devotee must dine after all and he should not speak during dining. All the desires of the one who observes all these twelve fasts and closes them properly are fulfilled and he attains abode of Vishnu along with his twenty-one generations.

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CHAPTER -17 DESCRIPTION OF FAST FOR LAKSHMINARAYAN

Sanatkumar says: " O great among the sages! Now I am narrating about an excellent fast, which destroys all the sins. Observing fast on full Moon

day is considered excellent among all the fasts. It leads to fulfillment of all the desires and protects the devotee from influence of harsh planets. Like the fast of Dwadashi, this fast is also begun from the month of Margsheersh and observed continuously on every full Moon day of succeeding months till Kartik when it is closed with proper rituals".

To begin with, one should start worshipping Lord Vishnu since the morning of full Moon day in the month of Margsheersh wearing white clothes and reciting NAMO NARAYANA.

After the worship, the devotee must perform a Havan on a square-shaped altar offering oblations with cooked cereals, sesame seeds, ghee etc. White flowers, unbroken rice grains and water are offered to the Lord. In the evening, the same things are offered to the rising full Moon also. A devotee must pass the night engaged in religious discussion, singing of devotional songs etc. Next day, donations are made to the Brahmins after performing usual worship. The same rituals are performed every month to observe the fast.

Rituals for closing this fast in the month of Kartik on full Moon day are also elaborate.

Fist of all, the devotee should build a rectangular canopy and decorate it with floral garlands, arches, lamps, cinnabar, mirrors, whiskers etc. At the center of the canopy, on the ground, Sarvatobhadra wheel should be drawn with five pillars. Then one to twelve ums are kept on this wheel and on these ums, silver or golden idols of Lord Vishnu are placed. These idols are bathed with milk containing curd, ghee, honey and five types of dry fruits. Then a proper elaborate worship is carried out for these idols. Night is passed singing devotional songs. Next morning, after proper worship, these idols are donated to the presiding priest. It is followed by feeding of Brahmins. All these rituals are closed with performing a Havan offering sesame seeds as oblation. Those who perform these worships with proper rituals enjoy worldly comforts lifelong and attain abode of Lord Vishnu.

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CHAPTER -18 FLAGGING IN THE TEMPLE OF LORD VISHNU

Sanatkumar says: "O Narada! Now I am narrating about the flagging fast in order to please Lord Vishnu. He who performs this fast is even

worshipped by Brahma and other deities. This fast accords virtues equal to those of donating one thousand carats of gold to a Brahmin or those attained taking bath in the Ganges and worshipping Shivalinga and basil sapling. " The devotee should observe this fast on the tenth day of the brighter phase in the month of Kartik. He should worship Sri Hari since morning after taking bath and wearing fresh clothes. He is expected to sleep before the idol that day. Next day, he should again perform worship, recite Nandishraddh along with four Brahmins and bathe masts of the two flags. He should then worship the Sun, the Moon and Garuda.

Then turmeric, sandalwood paste are smeared on the masts and white flowers are offered on them. Thereafter, the devotee must smear just enough ground with cow dung and produce a fire in an altar. One hundred and eight oblations are made with kheer in this fire. Havan thus performed is directed to Lord Vishnu, Brahma and Lakshmi then eight oblations are offered reciting -VENTEYAY SWAHA.

It is followed by oblations offered to the Sun, the Moon and Kamadhenu.

The night is passed in worship and performing Havans. Next morning, the same rituals are performed to worship Lord Vishnu. At last, the flags are carried to a temple of Lord Vishnu and installed at the pinnacle or on top of a column. Lord Vishnu is worshipped with proper rituals. Circumambulating the temple, one should then present Brahmins with clothes and Dakshaina, feed them and should take food after all. It is said that as long as the flag flutters in air, as much sins of the devotee are destroyed and he attains the abode of Lord Vishnu.

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CHAPTER -19 TALE OF THE KING SUMITS PREVIOUS BIRTH

Narada says: "O Sanatkumar! A king Sumit had performed this flagging fast for the first time. Kindly narrate to me the tale of his life."

Sanatkumar says: During Satya Yuga, a Somavanshi king Sumit was ruling the entire earth. He was very religious in nature and a great devotee of Lord Vishnu. He served the other devotees with respect and was a down to earth person.

His queen Satyamati was also a chaste woman. Both of them were the great worshippers of Sri Hari and knew everything about their previous birth. They regularly donated cereals and water. Satyamati used to dance in the temple of Lord Vishnu with pure feelings. The king also would install a big and beautiful flag in the temple on the twelfth day of brighter phase of every month. Their reputation had reached all the three worlds. One day, a sage Vibhandak came to visit the king along with his disciples. The king and the queen treated the sage with respect and the king himself seated on a lower seat before the sage.

The king says: "I am saved O sage! Now order me how can I serve you?"

The sage says: "O king! I am very much pleased with you. Now I will ask you a few questions. Answer them honestly. You regularly install a big and beautiful flag in the temple of Lord Vishnu whereas there are many more rituals to please Him. Tell me the reason for your actions."

The king says: "O sage! I tell the reason for my action. Kindly listen to it. In the previous birth, I was a Shudra named Malini and always engaged in appalling activities. One day, I abandoned my family and society and migrated to the forest where I sustained myself on deer's flesh. But there too, I used to rob the passersby. One day, I had nothing to eat nor could I lay my hand on any passerby. Scorching sun of the summer was adding to my woe moreover. Thus perplexed by the thirst, hunger and intense heat, I was roaming in the forest when all of a sudden I stumbled upon a temple of Lord Vishnu. It had long been deserted and was very much in dilapidated condition. A small lake was also there beside the temple. In the lake, beautiful birds like swan and ducks were playing and delicious fruits and scented flowers also abounded in the forest. Since I was feeling tired to the point of dropping down, I ate the fruits which had fallen on the ground. Then I took rest at the bank of the lake.

Since that day, I began to live in that temple. There I repaired the walls, cleaned the premises and erected a small hut for myself. But still, I used

to hunt small animals to satisfy my hunger. Twenty years passed like that. One day, a Sadhvi (a female hermit) named Avakokila, who hailed from a Nishad family in Vindhyachal, came there. Her family members had deserted her because of sinister actions she was involved in. She was thin and lean due to continuous starvation. Feeling pity on her, I gave her some fruits and flesh to eat. When she recovered, she narrated her tale that I am narrating to you as it was."

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Sadhvi says: "I was bom in the family of oarsman, Daruk was my father. I was a great backbiter, thief and sinner. My family therefore deserted me. For sometime, my husband fostered me but he too died. Since then, I have been wandering from this place to that and it is because of Lord's

grace that I have arrived here."

The king says: "Listening to her tale, I married her and we began to live in the temple. Every day we used to eat flesh and fruit. One day, under the intoxication of wine, we enjoyed our time greatly. We even began to dance forgetting our physical condition. Suddenly, agents of Yama arrived there and began to tighten their noose around us. Simultaneously, Sri Hari too sent His agents."

Vishnu's agents say: "O imprudent Yamadoots! Release this great devotee of Lord Vishnu. Yamadoots say: "These are abject sinners. We will definitely take them with us."

These words infuriated the agents of Vishnu.

Vishnu's agents say: "They are not sinners. They are great devotees and the servers of Lord Vishnu. This woman has performed a dance while this man has installed a flag in the temple. Thus, their sins have been destroyed and they have now a right to the supreme abode. They have served this temple for the past thirty-two years."

Saying this, the agents of Vishnu snapped the noose and carried us to the abode of Vishnu in a divine aircraft. Hearing this tale from the king Sumit, sage Vibhandak felt extreme joy and went to the forest.

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CHAPTER - 20 DESCRIPTION OF HARIPANCHRATRA VRATA

Sanatkumar says: O Narada! I am now narrating about another fast. It is Haripanchak fast and is rare in all the worlds. It destroys all the sorrows

of the devotee, fulfills his all desires and helps him attain the four goals of life. It is observed for five days in the month of Margsheersh starting from the tenth day of the brighter phase till the full Moon day. On the first day, a day long fast is observed after worshipping Lord Vishnu in the morning. It is broken with a plain meal in the evening.

Next day, Lord's idol is bathed with milk containing ghee, curd, honey and five types of dry fruits followed by usual worship. Vows of the fast are recited and prayers are made for their successful completion. That whole night and also the subsequent nights till full Moon night are passed reciting Lord's name and singing devotional songs. Bathing of Lord's idol with milk containing ghee, curd, honey and dry fruits continues in the morning everyday till full Moon day.

On the full Moon day, Havan is performed with oblations of sesame seeds and donations. On the sixth day, the devotee must drink Panchgavya and worship Sri Hari, feed Brahmins and only then should take meal silently. This fast is observed every month till Kartik and closing rituals are taken up in the month of Margsheersh next year. During the closing rituals, the devotee should observe day long fast on the eleventh day and take only Panchgavya on the twelfth day. Thereafter he should worship Lord Vishnu, donate honey, ghee, fruits, kheer and an um filled with water and containing five jewels to the Brahmin. He should then feed the Brahmins before himself taking any meal.

O Narada! Those who observe this Haripanchak fast never return from Brahmaloka. Those who desire for salvation should essentially observe this fast. It destroys all the sins like a fire destroys a forest. Its virtues are equal to those of donating millions of cows.

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CHAPTER - 21 DESCRIPTION OF THE FRUITS OF FAST

Sanatkumar says:"Now I am narrating about an excellent fast for the benefit of the world. Listen to it carefully O Narada! This fast must be

observed in the months of Ashadh, Shravan, Bhadrapad or Ashwin. On any day during the brighter phase of these months, the devotees must drink Panchgavya and pass his time in the vicinity of Lord Vishnu's idol. Then, reciting scriptures in the guidance of learned Brahmins, he should take a vow to observe a month long fast praying Lord Vishnu to protect him from any unforeseen crises. The devotee should since then pass his time in a temple for one month. Everyday, he should bathe the idol with milk containing ghee, curd, honey and dry fruits and light the lamps before the idol. He is also expected to pass his life in a natural way without using any artificial thing like toothpaste or soap. Then he should feed a Brahmin and give them Dakshaina. According to the provision of fast, the devotee should feed at least twelve Brahmins and donate jewelry. Virtues of this fast are enormous. A widow woman who has no son, ascetic, bachelor and Vanaprasthi should essentially observe this fast.

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CHAPTER - 22 TALE OF BHADRASHEEL BRAHMIN

Sanatkumar says: "O Narada! A fast on Ekadashi (eleventh day) in both the phases of a month pleases Sri Hari and fulfills all the desires. On the

eleventh day of each phase, one should not dine. Those who dine on the eleventh day commit severe sins. Salvation from sins like killing a Brahmin is possible but there is no method to eliminate the sins incurred because of dining on the eleventh day. Brahmins should essentially observe fast on the eleventh day of each phase. The preparations for Ekadashi Vrata start on the tenth day. The devotee should worship Sri Hari in the morning with proper rituals and pass the night in the vicinity of the idol."

On the eleventh day, the devotee should worship Sri Hari in the morning and take an oath to observe fast during the day and pray the Lord to protect him from calamities. The devotee must pass the night singing devotional songs, reciting scriptures and if possible dancing. In the morning of the twelfth day, he should worship Lord Vishnu as usual. Then he should feed Brahmins and make donations as per his powers. Performing five kinds of Yagyas, the devotee should break his fast in the last. During the period of fast, the devotee must not see wretched ones and desist from talking to such people who oppose Brahmins.

As there is no pilgrimage place holier than the Ganges; no teacher greater than the Mother and no deity more virtuous than Lord Vishnu. Similarly there is no fast greater than Ekadashi Vrata is. O Narada! I am now narrating an old tale. Listen to it carefully.

In the ancient times, a great sage Galav lived in the dense forest on the bank of the river Narmada. He was very peace loving and truth abiding in nature. The forest surrounding his hermitage was the playground for beautiful fauna, Yakshas, Gandharvas and Vidhyadhars. Sage Galav passed his time engaged in penance. Thus, he lived there for a long time. He had an equally virtuous son named Bhadrasheel who was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu and who knew everything about his previous birth. In his childhood, Bhadrasheel used to play with his friends but his plays reflected his religious sentiments. He would make an earthen idol of Lord Vishnu and worship it. He also would tell his friends to always worship Lord Vishnu and observe fast on the eleventh day of every phase in every month. His friends too followed him. During the worship, Bhadrasheel used to wish well for the entire world. His activities pleased the sage Galav very much.

Galav says: "O fortunate one! You are really Bhadrasheel because even the Yogis rarely have a nature like yours. You always indulge in worship of Hari, benefit of all and observe fast on Ekadashi. You always abstain from forbidden work. How come, you acquired such a peaceful and unconflicting mind. I am very much pleased with you. Kindly tell me, about your achievements."

Bhadrasheel says: "O father! I have some remembrance of my previous birth. During my previous birth, Yama had preached me about religion." These words surprised Galav. He says: "O fortunate one! Who were you in your previous birth? What did Yamaraj said to you and why?"

CHAPTER - 22 TALE OF BHADRASHEEL BRAHMIN

Sanatkumar says: "O Narada! A fast on Ekadashi (eleventh day) in both the phases of a month pleases Sri Hari and fulfills all the desires. On the eleventh day of each phase, one should not dine. Those who dine on the eleventh day commit severe sins. Salvation from sins like killing a Brahmin is possible but there is no method to eliminate the sins incurred because of dining on the eleventh day. Brahmins should essentially observe fast on the eleventh day of each phase. The preparations for Ekadashi Vrata start on the tenth day. The devotee should worship Sri Hari in the morning with proper rituals and pass the night in the vicinity of the idol."

On the eleventh day, the devotee should worship Sri Hari in the morning and take an oath to observe fast during the day and pray the Lord to protect him from calamities. The devotee must pass the night singing devotional songs, reciting scriptures and if possible dancing. In the morning of the twelfth day, he should worship Lord Vishnu as usual. Then he should feed Brahmins and make donations as per his powers. Performing five kinds of Yagyas, the devotee should break his fast in the last. During the period of fast, the devotee must not see wretched ones and desist from talking to such people who oppose Brahmins.

As there is no pilgrimage place holier than the Ganges; no teacher greater than the Mother and no deity more virtuous than Lord Vishnu. Similarly there is no fast greater than Ekadashi Vrata is. O Narada! I am now narrating an old tale. Listen to it carefully.

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Bhadrasheel says: "O great sage! I was a king in Soma dynasty. I had received knowledge from Dharmakeerti and Dattatreya. I ruled continuously for thousand years. During this period, I committed various religious as well as irreligious tasks. In the company of imposters, I too

became an imposter. Working diplomatically, I destroyed Yagyas. My subjects also followed me and began to behave irreligiously. I received sixth part of their evil deeds. One day, I went to the forest hunting. There, I killed many animals.

After a while, perplexed by thirst and hunger, I reached the bank of Narmada. I had strayed into deeper forests all alone. The intense sun was scorching my body. I was about to drop down because of hunger when I saw that people on the bank of Narmada were observing Ekadashi Vrata. I joined them and stayed awake all along the night without taking any food. But I could not bear the starvation and exertion and died as a result. Fierce looking Yamadoots took me to Yamaraj. Yamaraj asked Chitragupt to open the account of my life. Chitragupt thought for a moment and said: "Its true O Yamaraj that this person is a sinner. But now he is free from his sins due to observing fast on Ekadashi and passing his night in the company of pious devotees." Hearing these words, Yamaraj greeted me and worshipped me with devotion. Then, he called his servers."

Yamaraj says: "Listen to me, O agents! I am narrating something to your interest. Never bring to me in future anybody who is engaged in religious task. Stay away from those who always recite the name of Sri Hari. Greet them from a distance. This is my order as well as teaching to all of you. Spare all those who serve their teachers, love their religion, are helpless, serve the pious one and are truly deserving. Bring all such people who abuse their mother, hate the world, steal the wealth of temples and Brahmins, who are killers, who do not observe fast on Ekadashi, who are short tempered, criticize me and nurture hostility with others."

Hearing such words from Yamaraj, fire of penance began to burn within me. More intense this fire grew, more of my sins were destroyed. I acquired an appearance of Sri Hari. Even, Yamaraj greeted me with respect. His action even surprised the Yamadoots. Worshipping me, Yamaraj sent me on a divine aircraft to the abode of Vishnu.

O father! I was passing my time happily. I did not know how and when crores of years passed. Then I arrived in Indraloka. There I stayed with the gods for many Kalpas. It was after such a great experience that I have arrived on the earth. Having the knowledge of my previous birth, I always engaged in the worship of Hari and inspire others to follow suit. Earlier, I

didn't know the virtues of Ekadashi Vrata. But now, because of the knowledge of my previous births, I have come to know about it. I observed it without any desire and without knowing that I was actually observing a fast and received so much in return. Hence, I cannot tell how much will one receive if he observes Ekadashi Vrata with some desire. Those who devotedly worship Sri Hari and observe Ekadashi Vrata attain even the supreme abode of Lord Vishnu."

The words of his son gladdened sage Galav. He says- "My birth has been successful because I got such a devotee son like you who told me the complete method of worshipping Lord Vishnu."

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